

From the dean — Reflections on the Murrow Program

Elsewhere in this issue, you can read about the Edward R. Murrow Program for Journalists, which the School conducted for the U.S. State Department April 5-12. Please allow me in this space to relate my personal reactions to an experience that affected me a great deal.

The School hosted 14 journalists from Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Germany, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Morocco, Netherlands, Oman, Palestine Authority, United Kingdom and Yemen. Those from Germany, Netherlands and the United Kingdom work with media targeted to Arabs. Our aim was to explain (as much as possible in a week) how the press operates in the United States. Louise Spieler, assistant dean for distance education and executive education, did a marvelous job of planning and organizing the program, and she was ably assisted by Rachel Lillis, the program assistant in her office.

The 14 journalists and their two interpreters and two administrative officers were strangers to us when we greeted them on April 5. By the time they left on April 12, we had become good friends and colleagues who had bonded and learned a tremendous amount from each other. Besides what they learned in our program, the participants were treated royally by



Tom Bowers

the Triangle International Visitors Council, which arranged home visits, a trip to the beach at Wilmington, a tour of Raleigh and a host of other activities designed to help them learn about Americans and American culture. We took the group to Lenoir Hall for lunch, and they went back on their own later in the week. Some of them sampled nightlife on Franklin Street, and a few had a spontaneously arranged dinner with some students.

The presenters from the School were prepared to lecture on their topic for an hour or more. They found after 15 minutes or so, however, that questions and comments from the participants led them down new paths and away from what they had intended to say. So many memorable discussions arose that week that it is hard to pick out just a few.

Pulitzer-prize winning political cartoonist Doug Marlette, who is on the School's Board of Visitors, told the group that he feels a mandate to offend people in his cartoons. He showed them a sample of his work that included cartoons that had offended a wide range of people and groups. He ended with a cartoon he had captioned "What would Mohammed drive?" This was done before the cartoons in the Danish press that engendered

so much controversy and violence throughout the world. Doug defended his rationale for doing the cartoon, and he was immediately challenged by the Arab journalists for offending the sensibilities of Muslims. Doug held his ground, and the resulting discussion was one of the most illuminating I have ever heard in this School. Some of the Arabs sided with Doug, and when it was over, even those who still disagreed with him came forward warmly to talk more and to have their picture taken with him. It was an inspiring moment.

Professor Rhonda Gibson talked to the group about ethical guidelines and practices in the American press, and she soon found herself leading a discussion about situations that most American journalists do not have to deal with. When she said journalists should generally reveal the names of their sources, an Iraqi journalist told her that many of his sources would be murdered if he revealed their names.

Again and again, we learned of the dangerous conditions under which the Arab journalists had to operate. Hodding Carter III put it in perspective, however, when he described the threats his family faced in Greenville, Miss., in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s because of their family newspaper's stance in favor of civil rights and integration. The threats arose from an orthodoxy of racial oppression supported and abetted by a religious extremist group (Ku

Klux Klan). While he did not make a direct comparison to the situation facing journalists in the Middle East, the similarities were not lost on the audience.

I was sad to see the week end because I had made many new friends and learned about a culture that was unfamiliar to me. As I told the group at the end of the program, when I now hear news about Arabs and the Middle East, I will no longer have a faceless perception but will now think of my Arab friends. News about violence in the Middle East and violence against journalists will cause me to wonder if a friend has been affected.

Speaking of sadness at the thought of something ending, this year has gone by much faster than I expected. By the time you read the next issue of the *Communicator*, Jean Folkerts will be sitting in the dean's office in Carroll Hall. This has been an immensely rewarding year for me, and I could not have written a better script for a way to spend my 35th and final year at the School. The School will be in Jean's good hands, and I can assure her that her job will be immensely easier because of the dedication and hard work of everyone on the faculty and staff. The School has great faculty and staff members, super students and wonderful alumni. I owe a heartfelt thanks to all who made this year possible and rewarding for me.

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Calendar of events in the School

May 16
Classes in the first summer session begin.

May 29
Memorial Day holiday.
Classes are cancelled.
School offices are closed.

June 19-22
The N.C. Scholastic Media Association will conduct its annual journalism institute. The institute teaches creative and efficient ways to communicate in high school media. For more information, visit <http://www.ibiblio.org/ncsma>.

June 21-22
The State -- and future -- of Business Journalism, a symposium bringing together top thinkers in business journalism to discuss issues affecting the craft and how the field can be improved, will be held in the School. To register or for more information, please visit <http://www.jomc.unc.edu/executiveeducation> or call 1-877-668-0674.

